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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 001255

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PBTS MO KDEM IZ LE SO SU XI

SUBJECT: KING'S THRONE DAY SPEECH FOCUSES ON WESTERN SAHARA AND ELECTIONS

REF: A. RABAT 1223

¶B. RABAT 1155

¶C. 06 RABAT 1450

Classified by Ambassador Thomas Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: King Mohammed VI's July 30 Throne Day speech focused on his commitment to gradual reform as well as the two most pressing national issues: the Western Sahara and upcoming parliamentary elections. He reaffirmed Morocco's intention to negotiate on the basis of autonomy, but "nothing but autonomy." He called for credible elections that reflect the will of the people but drew a strong red line around his own prerogatives. The King called on every Moroccan to play a role in the fight against terrorism. In a brief discussion of regional issues, he praised Palestinian President Abbas, the Arab Peace Initiative and measures to "enhance stability in Iraq, Lebanon, the Sudan and Somalia." While local reaction to the King's annual speech has been predictably overwhelmingly positive, political parties deployed the King's words to meet the needs of their own electoral strategies. End Summary.

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Western Sahara: "autonomy, and nothing but autonomy"  
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¶12. (SBU) On July 30, Morocco celebrated the eighth anniversary of the coronation of King Mohammed VI. In addition to a range of ceremonies, the King offered his annual address to the nation. The King welcomed the international community's support for the Moroccan autonomy plan for the Western Sahara and thanked "the influential powers" who have backed the "historic" Moroccan initiative. He also laid out clear parameters for upcoming negotiations, saying "Morocco is and will remain ready to negotiate on autonomy, and nothing but autonomy." (Comment: Probably alluding to the role of Algeria, the King pledged to reach out to "all parties" and called for "good neighborliness" while at the same time declaring that Morocco will not "be made hostage to the calculations of others." End Comment.)

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King Urges Transparent Elections, But No Change in "Values"  
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¶13. (SBU) The King called for an issues-based political campaign free of empty electoral slogans. The King cited national consensus on the nation's fundamental values. "Open, moderate Islam, constitutional monarchy, national unity, territorial integrity and social democracy" are, in his words, "immutable values for which there is unanimous support."

¶4. (SBU) The King spoke out against corruption, saying he would "fight all practices which might undermine the credibility of elections." Referring to the post-election government, the King said "the electoral process should lead to a coherent majority from which an effective, compact cabinet should emerge." (Note: While the King thus implied that the cabinet should reflect the elected majority, he did not explicitly make the same commitment about the new prime minister. The current prime minister, Driss Jettou, was appointed by the King in 2002 when the newly elected political parties were not able to come to an agreement. End Note). The King lauded the detailed electoral platforms presented to date by political parties (ref b) as "a particularly important development." (Comment: Many of those platforms are at least in part a product of USG-funded democracy training programs. End Comment.)

¶5. (SBU) The King also revisited a prominent theme from last year's speech (ref c), that of voter responsibility and civic duty, exhorting Moroccans to "rise to the challenge" of the upcoming elections. "We all have a duty to make sure the next general election stands as a landmark in the process of consolidating standard democratic practice," he said. The King praised the role of civil society, saying that elections should reflect the will of the people and that the value of modern participatory democracy lies in the ability of all stakeholders to contribute to government "regardless of their convictions or leanings."

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Constitutional Reform On The Horizon?  
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¶6. (SBU) With cautious but encouraging language, the King signaled his intention to pursue (gradual) constitutional reform. The King described the governance system he seeks as "an efficient, civic-minded monarchy which cannot be reduced to a mere distribution of powers between an executive organ, a legislative body and a judicial authority." While he recognized the value of separate branches, the King indicated that he would retain his constitutional right to keep a hold on the reigns of power, in part to ensure that reform takes place at a controlled pace. He visibly distinguished the powers of the King from those of his ministries, saying "constitutional institutions have competencies of their own, which are exercised apart from those of the Monarch." Similarly, the King promised "gradual institutional reform through more comprehensive, loftier changes." While refraining from spelling out what measures he had in mind, he said they would be discussed "soon," implying this might be done with the new parliament.

¶7. (SBU) The King underscored that reform of the judiciary will be given priority. Morocco will modernize and increase confidence in the judiciary, which he called "the cornerstone of the rule of law." He also pledged to support free enterprise and small and medium businesses, and restructure the education and training system to help meet the growing needs of the economy. The King said he planned to devolve (unspecified) powers and allocate resources to local authorities with the goal of gradually setting up "a modern regional system involving all the Kingdom's regions." However, he stressed that autonomy would be applicable exclusively to the Sahara.

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"Security Is Everyone's Concern"  
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¶8. (SBU) Introducing the theme of civic duty into the discourse on national security, the King emphasized the role of ordinary Moroccans in fighting terrorism. "Security is everyone's concern," he said. The King also pointed to

economic development and poverty alleviation programs as a means to prevent the growth of extremism. He explained that particular attention must be paid to youth so they are not "manipulated by the forces of darkness."

¶9. (SBU) Reiterating Prime Minister Jettou's recent remarks to parliament praising the security services (ref a), the King thanked all security and defense personnel, in particular those serving in the Western Sahara and those working in counter-terrorism, and pledged to improve their numbers, living conditions, and material resources.

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Brief Discussion of Global, Regional Events  
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¶10. (SBU) The King praised the Moroccan diplomatic service for its recent successes and called on the government to provide the service with "the material means and competent human resources it needs." He lauded Morocco's role in promoting global issues, including peace and security, counter-terrorism, cultural and religious tolerance, human rights, the advancement of women, protection of the environment and sustainable development.

¶11. (SBU) Compared to previous years, the King spent relatively little time discussing Morocco's views toward regional events. He succinctly laid out Morocco's position on the Middle East, pledging his support for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, his efforts to resolve the current Palestinian schism, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

¶12. (SBU) The King said he intends to participate in French President Sarkozy's "promising" Mediterranean union project, and expressed solidarity with the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa. He specifically encouraged "all measures which enhance security and stability in Iraq, Lebanon, the Sudan and Somalia, and respect their sovereignty and territorial integrity." At the end of the list, he noted that "building the Maghreb Union will remain a prime objective of our foreign policy."

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Favorable Reaction to Royal Discourse  
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¶13. (C) Moroccan media has been flooded with factual reporting on the King's speech, as well as congratulatory messages to the King from numerous world leaders. Local

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reaction has been predictably positive and filled with praise of the King's remarks. There has been no criticism of the King's speech, and none is expected, the bottom line on freedom of expression here.

¶14. (C) Interestingly, political parties use their exegesis of the King's words to benefit their own causes. Party for Justice and Development (PJD) Parliament Leader Lahcen Daoudi, after praising the speech, asserted that it showed there was no difference between the King's wishes and the platforms of "those parties who have a real program," highlighting his party's clean credentials against other parties steeped in fraud. In contrast, Popular Movement Union (UMP) Minister of Agriculture Mohammed Laenser, sometimes tipped as a potential PM, said the speech warned of the dangers of fundamentalism (i.e. the PJD), a sentiment echoed by USFP leader Mohammed El Yagzhi.

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Comment  
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¶15. (C) The King centered his speech on two prominent and timely national items: the Western Sahara and the upcoming legislative elections, unlike on last year's throne day when

there were no looming national agenda items to stress. The King, while promising change, also used the speech to emphasize his red lines -- no discussion of independence for Western Sahara and little substantial diminution of the Monarchy's prerogatives -- as well as to manage expectations for constitutional reform following the elections. End Comment.

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